

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS NOTICE

56-02

12/17/2002

Sampling of Poultry Carcasses Cut Up Prior to Chilling

I. What is the purpose of this notice?

The purpose of this notice is to provide guidance to FSIS inspection program personnel and to respond to questions about sampling cut-up poultry carcasses to do microbiology, zero fecal tolerance, and Finished Product Standards (FPS) verification checks.

II. Cut-up poultry carcasses prior to chilling.

A. Question: Is water and ice chilling of individual major poultry portions and parts, including drumsticks, thighs, split halves, and split breasts, permitted?

Answer: Yes. The new regulation 9 CFR 381.66(c)(2)(ii), specifically allows cooling major poultry portions by chilling in water and ice. In addition, there is no longer a regulation that precludes the method of chilling of individual poultry parts, including drumsticks, thighs, split halves, and split breasts, by continuous chilling in water and ice. In other words, poultry parts may now be cooled in water and ice as well as with air.

B. Question: What is the difference between major poultry portions and poultry parts?

Answer: 9 CFR 381.170 (b)(22) defines a major portion of a poultry carcass as an eviscerated poultry carcass from which parts may be missing, or the front or rear portions of transversely-split carcasses. A part is considered a section of the poultry carcass such as breasts, breasts with ribs, drumsticks, thighs, wings, and all others mentioned in 9 CFR 381.170 (b), which is less than one half of the carcass.

C. Question: Can a carcass be cut into major portions or parts, as defined above, after inspection and prior to chilling?

Answer: Yes. There is no regulation that precludes an establishment from cutting an inspected and passed carcass into major portions or parts before chilling.

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III. Microbiological Sampling

A. Question: Can establishments collect samples for generic *E. coli* and can FSIS inspection program personnel collect samples for the *Salmonella* performance standards using major poultry portions or parts?

Answer: Yes. However, when possible, establishments are to collect samples for generic *E. coli* (9 CFR 381.94(a)(2)(ii)) testing using a whole carcass at the end of the chilling process. Likewise, inspection program personnel are to collect samples for the *Salmonella* performance standard testing (FSIS Directive 10,230.5, section 3-2 (c)) using a whole carcass from chilling after the drip line, but before packaging/cut-up.

When major poultry portions or parts are collected for either generic *E. coli* or the *Salmonella* performance standard testing, the sampling collection location is the same as for the whole carcass (see above) and collectors are to collect the equivalent of a whole carcass by “recombining” sections and parts that would constitute a whole carcass. For example, if an establishment is producing only front and back carcass halves, the sample size will consist of one front half and one back half. If an establishment is producing only parts, the sample size will consist of those parts that, when recombined, would be equivalent to a whole carcass. The halves and parts may be from any carcass as long as the “recombined” carcass contains all expected parts of a whole carcass.

IV. Finished Product Standards (FPS) testing

A. Question: Can FSIS inspection program personnel conduct FPS pre-chill verification activities on major portions or parts?

Answer: Yes. However, when possible, inspection program personnel are to collect ten whole carcasses after the final wash and before the chill step for FPS pre-chill testing. At this point, carcasses typically have not undergone splitting and the sampling can be accomplished using ten whole carcasses. If whole carcasses are not available at this point in processing, inspection program personnel are to sample the equivalent of ten whole carcasses by recombining all expected parts for each whole carcass.

(NOTE: If inspection program personnel collect samples for FPS pre-chill testing using major portions or parts, he or she should inform the establishment that, if the FPS pre-chill tests result in product action at the post-chill location as described in 9 CFR 381.76, then the establishment will need to conduct subgroup retests on major portions and parts from **all** chill-tanks receiving parts originating from carcasses prior to cut-up.)

B. Question: How is the current FPS post-chill testing applied in establishments performing continuous chilling of major poultry portions or parts?

Answer: The FPS post-chill test is designed to assess the presence of extraneous material in the chill tank. Therefore, this test must be performed on products exiting each separate chill tank. For example, if major poultry portions are chilled in separate tanks, then ten major portions or ten parts are collected separately and scored against the criteria set forth in 9 CFR 381.76.

V. Zero tolerance fecal checks

Question: Can FSIS inspection program personnel perform fecal zero tolerance tests on major portions or parts?

Answer: Yes. However, inspection program personnel are to conduct the fecal zero tolerance procedure, as outlined in FSIS Directive 6150.1 rev. 1, from ten whole carcasses after the final wash and before the chill step (the same location as the FPS pre-chill testing). At this point in processing, carcasses typically have not undergone splitting, and the sampling can be done using ten whole carcasses. If whole carcasses are not available at this point in processing, sampling should be accomplished using a sample size equivalent to ten whole carcasses by recombining the parts or halves from any carcass as long as the “recombined” carcass contains all expected parts of a whole carcass.

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